

The Book Club of California

QUARTERLY

News-Letter

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Annual Meeting

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The Book Club of California: Its Impress on Fine Printing

By James D. Hart

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The *Aldus* is unusual in possessing two "edition" issued more than thirty years apart, but it has an even greater distinction in Club history: it is the first of the "leaf books" that the Club published. The membership so much liked this kind of publication that many more have followed. According to John Borden, David Magee, and Duncan Olmsted, who have made a "Check List of 'Leaf Books'" for the Club's *Quarterly News-Letter*, only 77 such publications could be discovered to have been put together by publishers anywhere at any time. Indeed, a stricter interpretation of the term would lessen that amount rather considerably, since this figure includes portfolios of diverse leaves accompanied by very little explanatory text and not bound as books. The bibliographers discovered two early specimens, dated 1865 and 1897-8, but after them they listed only one other leaf book that, by just three years, precedes the Club's book. The *Aldus* of 1924 was followed in that decade and thereafter by a great number of such works, the Club itself producing eleven more leaf books. They related respectively to *The Nuremberg Chronicle* in 1930, the King James Bible in 1937, Caxton's *Polycricon* in 1938, the *Spectator* in 1939, Benjamin Franklin's printing, also in 1939, Wynkyn de Worde's *Golden Legend* in 1949, the publications of three members of the distinguished Estienne family, also in 1949, a fifteenth-century herbal in 1957, an early edition of Chaucer in 1963, the great Complutensian Bible in 1966, and Holinshed's *Chronicles* in 1968. The Club therefore not only has been among the first to issue a leaf book but has been the creator of an unusually great number of varied and informative studies of literary and typographical monuments illustrated by original pages.

The end of the Club's second decade was marked by the end of the great stock market boom that had given many people money enough for memberships in cultural societies and the purchase of finely printed

volumes. The Club's third decade—from 1932 to 1941—began just after the crash of the stock market and ended with the holocaust at Pearl Harbor. These were dreadfully difficult years for the Club, which was kept going only by the drive and dedication of such men as Albert Bender, its perennial head of the Publications Committee, and Oscar Lewis, its talented and devoted Secretary, who edited, introduced, and even wrote books, according to the Club's needs. Although membership dwindled, sometimes at an alarmingly fast rate, the Club managed to survive. Between 1929 and 1941 it published twenty-eight books. Two presses still accounted for most of them. Eleven books came from the Grabhorn Press; six were printed by John Henry Nash. On the whole, Nash inclined toward literary texts. From his press came the little play that A. Edward Newton wrote on the occasion of his election as President of the Johnson Society of Lichfield, a fancy edition of *The Heathen Chinees*, the *California Sketches* of a neglected author, Prentice Mulford, and a leaf book of *The Spectator*, as well as another of *The Nuremberg Chronicle*. The Grabhorn's production was somewhat more varied. It included Oscar Lewis' fine little study of earlier versions of Twain's Jumping Frog story, handsome "leaf books" of the King James Bible and Caxton's printing, as well as a collection of D. H. Lawrence's poetry. Many of the other Grabhorn works were Californiana and Western Americana. Among them were the great folio edition of H.M.T. Powell's account of his gold rush journey titled *The Santa Fe Trail to California*, *The Drawings and Letters of Daniel Wadsworth Coit* that the editor, Edith Coulter, appropriately subtitled "An Artist in El Dorado," and a selection from Captain Beechey's *Account of a Visit to California* in 1826 and 1827.

The books printed by Nash and the Grabhorns were distinguished examples of bookmaking, regardless of their subjects, but this period is more strikingly marked by the Club turning to new and younger printers after sixteen years and thirty-two publications created by only three presses. The first of the new presses was that of Johnck and Seeger. The two men had been in business for only a year when they produced their first little book for the Club, Lewis Browne's *The Final Stanza*. Of their two other publications, also hardly more than bound booklets, one was an account of the San Francisco earthquake and fire by William Marion Reedy, the St. Louis editor, titled *The City That Has Fallen*. One irate member wrote to the Board to complain that the text used the undignified name of Frisco for the city, enough to make it fall all over again. As David Magee, the bibliographer of the Club's first hundred books, observed, Reedy "did not see San Francisco until 1920, fourteen years after the

disaster about which he writes—a fact which may account for his solecism of referring to ‘Frisco’ throughout his article. He died in San Francisco soon after his arrival. Could there be a moral in this?”

Another of the new San Francisco printers was The Windsor Press, established in 1924 by James and Cecil Johnson who had come to California from their native Australia. In 1929 they printed Witter Bynner’s essay, *The Persistence of Poetry*, in a charming little book that the author autographed. Before World War II forced the Johnson brothers to give up their shop, they turned out four more little works for the Club, marked by an attractive style, if one that was somewhat too mannered and occasionally unhappily imitative as well. Perhaps the prettiest was *A Printer’s Garland*, a miscellany of typographic fancies in which the Johnsons created and gathered together attractively designed title and text pages for works of literature so various as *Aucassin et Nicolette* and *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*. The Club also had one book printed by the University of California Press, the only time it ever turned to a large plant of that sort and ever countenanced both machine-made paper and linotype, but its edition of Clarence King’s *The Helmet of Mambrino* was enhanced by the Press’s manager, Samuel T. Farquhar, at one time in partnership with Johnck and Seeger.

The last of the new printers is the only one to continue to produce works for the Book Club down to the present day. That is Ward Ritchie, whose press, established in Los Angeles in 1932, helped to bring distinguished typography to southern California. Two years after he set up his press, Ward Ritchie prepared one leaflet for the Club’s first series of Keepsakes, and for many years he continued annually to contribute to new series. Then in 1939 he and Gregg Anderson, who had once been at the Grabhorn Press, produced for the Club a book composed of a facsimile of Franklin’s edition of Cato’s *Moral Distichs* with a foreword by Carl Van Doren, incorporating also an actual page of Franklin’s *Prayer Book* of 1745. For the brief letterpress of the Foreword, Ritchie used Caslon type and printer’s flowers to capture the atmosphere of eighteenth-century typography. Ritchie’s versatility was made evident to Club members next year when he printed a collection of early California poems in a style suited to the title, *Ballads of El Dorado*, for its illustrations, moving fluidly over the endpapers and on to the text pages, are far removed from the classic purity of the earlier book, even though Caslon type is employed again. These were the first books to come from southern California and thus gave an earnest to the quality and diversity it would add to the Club’s publications.

Despite the variety of treatment and text offered by the Club's books not enough members subscribed to its publications. Even during the rich 1920's the young Club often had difficulty selling books. The President not infrequently had to write to members letters like one preserved in the files concerning *The Kasidah*: "Believing that you would be sorry to miss the opportunity of securing so rarely beautiful a volume, we are reserving two copies for you. Will you kindly send us your instructions regarding these, and also let us know if you wish to secure any additional copies before the edition is exhausted." Well, the edition of that book wasn't exhausted for nineteen years, although it is a wonder that benefactors and Board Members alike weren't drained before then. The Depression proved to be a particularly exhausting time.

Most of the books published in the Club's early years sold fairly slowly and their sales slowed even more during the Depression. For example, of the 300 copies of *The Vision of Mirzah* published in 1917, forty-six were still available in 1933. Ina Coolbrith's *California* remained in stock for eighteen years, while Clark Ashton Smith's *Odes and Sonnets*, also issued in 1918, took twenty-seven years to sell out. Even a book so delightful in text and typography as Oscar Lewis' *The Origins of the Celebrated Jumping Frog*, issued in the Depression year of 1931, moved slowly enough so that ten percent of its edition of 250 copies was still available two years after publication, although they were gone before their third season. To help improve sales, the Directors in 1933 offered members a twenty-five percent reduction on all remaining copies of the twenty-six works still in stock. But even while forced to this expedient, the determined Directors went right ahead with a publishing program. Not a year passed during the long Depression decade of the 1930's when they didn't produce some new work. All told, twenty-one titles were issued by comparison with the twenty-five that were printed during the affluent Twenties, and although in each decade there were years when but one title was published, the more conventional schedule of three was nearly as often reached in the poor as in the rich decade. Recalling the success of its first leaf-book—the *Aldus* issued in 1924—the Club also tried comparable ventures during the Depression. It was a good idea. Two-thirds of the total edition of *A Leaf from the 1611 King James Bible* were sold within two weeks of publication in 1937, and for the 35 copies possessed of particularly fine leaves, 116 orders were received! Similarly, all of the 297 copies of *An Original Leaf from the Polycricon*, published in 1938, were sold within a fortnight.

Prices on all Club books were remarkably reasonable. Its first text—Cowan's *Bibliography*—had sold for twenty dollars, but not until seventeen

years later was a book so expensive as that attempted again. Then the top price was even increased by fifty percent to the thirty dollars charged for *The Santa Fé Trail*, issued as a handsome and substantial folio in 1931. But most of the publications were surprisingly cheap for such beautiful books. Except for these two works, during the first twenty-five years only one book was priced above fifteen dollars. Of the remainder, four titles were sold for fifteen dollars, seven titles for prices between ten dollars and fourteen dollars, fourteen titles for prices between five dollars and nine dollars, and the remaining twenty titles for prices that were less than five dollars. The printers always priced their books reasonably and the Club took almost no markup, although it had to pay for wrapping and postage, even if it did not count overhead of rent, heat, and so on. The Grabhorns' *Philobiblon* and *The Book of Ruth* cost the Club respectively ten dollars and three dollars a copy and were sold to the members for the identical prices. The same printers' publication of the first edition of Charles Warren Stoddard's *Diary* of a visit to the Molokai leper colony cost the Club two dollars a copy. It was sold to members for two dollars and twenty-five cents a copy. Even at that price Oscar Lewis had to dispatch unordered copies to selected members with a personal letter to each, declaring that "If, after examination you find that you do not care to keep it, please telephone the Club and it will be called for." It is not known whether the Secretary had to use his own shoe leather or whether he got carfare to pick up unwanted copies, or how many books were returned, but the records do show that only in the Spring of 1936, three years after publication, was the last volume sold.

Certainly neither printers nor authors grew rich. When Professor Franklin Walker's edition of Prentice Mulford's *California Sketches* was issued in 1935, the Club paid five dollars a copy for it and sold it for but fifty cents more. For his 17-page Introduction and his editorial work on the 105 pages of Mulford's text, Professor Walker received twenty-five cents bit by bit (or, I should say, two bits by two bits), for each copy sold of the 350 that were printed. Eventually he earned a munificent \$87.50. The only author who came off at all well was John Drinkwater, the Englishman whose play about Lincoln had been a great success a decade before the Club requested him to write for it a preface to a nineteenth-century text on Lincoln. In the palmy early days of 1929 his six-and-a-half page introduction and his signing of 353 copies of the book brought him not only five hundred dollars but three copies of the book, the three which he could presumably sign for himself at his own leisure. At that, Oscar Lewis had to write more prefatory comments to bulk out Drink-

water's text. These were doubtless accepted gratis as part of his job that required the writing of letters to importune sales and a good deal of traveling around town to deliver copies. No editor or author before or since has been so highly paid as Drinkwater. Local writers, satisfied that their works were embellished by elegant typography, gladly accepted small payments, and even a man so distinguished as Robinson Jeffers wrote profuse thanks when he received one hundred dollars and ten copies from the Club upon publication of *Themes in My Poems* in 1956, the same fee he had received in 1940 for his foreword to D. H. Lawrence's *Fire*, a collection of nine poems, all but one there first published, for which Lawrence's widow Frieda seemingly got no greater payment, if that much.

Despite such low prices paid to printers and such small fees granted to creators of books, members sometimes grumbled at what the Club cost them; so it was that one of New York's major publishers of trade books and some limited editions as well indignantly resigned during the Depression because membership fees were not reduced from the long-established ten dollars. Other persons continued their membership but bought books more infrequently. The situation grew so bad that in 1934 the Club temporarily altered its policy to restrict sales to members by issuing a cooperative catalogue with The Grolier Club, The Caxton Club, The Club of Odd Volumes, the Carteret Book Club, and The Book Club of Texas, from which members of any of the organizations might purchase the publications of the others. It is not recorded how much this helped the Book Club, but the catalogue makes clear that the five other clubs combined could offer only forty different titles while the Book Club listed seventeen of its own. The other societies were more explicitly social groups for dining and discussion than for publishing, and yet it is interesting to observe how much more their West Coast junior contributed to the well-printed word. For example, The Caxton Club, founded in 1895, did not issue its fiftieth publication until 1955, the year when the younger Book Club of California published its ninety-first work, and the Book Club alone remained steadfast in continuing a publication program year in and year out.

Further to help the sale of its books and also to hold members by offering them something more without an increase in dues, the Club established its *Quarterly News-Letter* in May of 1933. The very title committed the journal to regular publication, even though it started off as a simple eight-page periodical almost exclusively devoted to advertising the Club's own books, in all the ingenious ways that Oscar Lewis, the editor and sole

author, could conceive. After it had run a full year, the *News-Letter* was enlarged to twelve pages and then it began to print regular articles on subjects other than its own publishing program. The first was George Harding's "The Origins of California's First Printing Press," an appropriate subject by an authority, since 1934 marked the centenary of the beginning of printing in California. The next issue printed an article on "California's First Library," recalling the books that Serra assembled at the Carmel mission. Slowly, over the years, the *News-Letter* outgrew its original commercial purpose and became a little journal of consequence in its own right, with Club news and notes on publications reduced to an incidental level, while more substantial articles led it to be listed in the annual bibliography of the Modern Language Association. What came to loom large were well-informed articles on fine printing, not only in California and the United States, but in England and on the Continent as well. For local presses, great and amateur, it provided the first check lists and helped to create collectors. Bibliophiles with already established concerns in other fields contributed articles on the subjects of their collections that varied widely from French *livres de luxe* to publications issued by the Catholic Recusants of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England. There were articles too on book collections and libraries here and abroad and on authors, persons, and places within the scope of the members' interests.

Soon after launching the *News-Letter* the Board undertook another publishing venture for comparable purposes. This was the series of Keepsakes begun in 1933-1934. They were then, and have usually been since, twelve separate leaflets devoted to a single subject of interest to Club members. The first presented early prints of California mining towns with appropriate accompanying texts. The second reproduced in facsimile letters by California authors of the past, each accompanied by a comment especially written for the Club, so that, for example, the letter of George Sterling was introduced by Robinson Jeffers, the one by Joaquin Miller was the subject of a statement by his daughter Juanita, and that of Jack London was remarked upon by his widow Charmian. Over the succeeding years, a great variety of significant pictorial and textual material has been handsomely printed in the annual Keepsakes that, although issued without charge, have become important publications, second only to the Club's own books.

The Depression years lengthened into the war years, when Keepsakes were suspended, the *News-Letter* combined issues that failed to live up to its title of "Quarterly," and even books were issued spasmodically, for

there was but one in 1942 and none in 1943 or 1944. But at the end of the war the Club picked up again. The reactivated Keepsakes not only made possible the publication of texts whose subject matter was too slight or too specialized for a regular book, but also allowed the Club to patronize new presses and even amateur printers who could not have handled a full volume. In the publications program itself the Club continued to aid new printers so as to bring members the work of all the fine presses in California.

The first of the new printers was Lewis Allen, an old-time San Franciscan, whose father before him had belonged to the Club from its early days. With his wife Dorothy, Lewis Allen printed his first book in 1940; five years later he printed his fourth book, and this one was commissioned by the Club, an act by which he said he was "gently but firmly plucked from the doldrums of anonymity and given a certain stature among the book printers of the West." The casual manner of giving a commission both delighted and puzzled him, for, as he pointed out, the Club approves a text and gives "an approximate deadline. From here on you are ignored. You are never asked for a progress report or trial pages." Allen's first book left him on his own even more than usual because it was he who conceived of subject, text, and illustrations when he had the interesting idea to depict what he called the "Heraldry of New Helvetia," thirty-two cattle brands and ear marks registered at Sutter's Fort from 1845 to 1848. The Club liked his conception of this curious bit of Californiana, and so began a happy association, continued the next year with a printing of Patrick Breen's diary of his experiences with the Donner Party, introduced and annotated by George R. Stewart, the authority on the subject, and further continued in 1946 by another, more miscellaneous gathering of Donner Party diaries and documents.

In 1949 the Club turned to another new printer, The Black Vine Press, one of whose partners, Harold Seeger, had been a member of Johnck and Seeger, a firm that had printed its first Book Club publication twenty years before. But this was a new organization, incorporating also Albert Sperisen, an active participant in Club affairs, and Lawton Kennedy, a legendarily accomplished pressman. Together they produced a nice little piece of Californiana, *Gregory's Guide for California Travellers*, which they followed the next year by the first printing of some engaging letters that J. Ross Browne wrote home from Monterey in 1849, suitably titled *Muleback to the Convention*.

The Club commissioned still another new firm, the Greenwood Press, in 1949. Its owner, Jack Stauffacher, later declared that he was happy to be

selected because the Club afforded an opportunity by which “the younger practitioners of my generation strove to emulate the local Masters, . . . enriching and encouraging these younger men in their craft.” Adrian Wilson, who worked for the Greenwood Press at that time, recalls more vividly the effect of the Book Club’s first inquiry: “One day while Jack was on the roof sunning himself with his intended, the telephone rang and a Mrs. Downs asked for the proprietor of the Press. I told the lady that Mr. Stauffacher was unfortunately engaged at the moment, but she refused to be put off, saying that it concerned looking at a manuscript for a book. Since it sounded like the possibility of the only paying job we had had in weeks, I asked her to hold on, and scrambled up the ladder in the elevator shaft, through the secret trap door and out onto the gravel roof with its tarry chimneys and backdrop of windowed office buildings. Disentangling Jack, I breathlessly told him the news. ‘It’s the BOOK CLUB!’ he screamed and bolted down the shaft.”

The result of the telephone call was a commission to print *The Miner’s Own Book*, and its attractive treatment led to other works well-printed by Stauffacher and also, in course of time, to some handsome ones from Adrian Wilson when he got his own press. The first of Wilson’s books was also the first book published by the Club in its fifth decade, beginning in 1952. Specially written for the Club at the suggestion of Joseph Henry Jackson, the literary editor of the *San Francisco Chronicle* and a Director of the Club, this work by a young *Chronicle* reporter, Warren Unna, told an appealing story of the bohemian life of San Francisco at the turn of the century as an outgrowth of its basic commentary on the murals that decorated Coppa’s Restaurant, a favorite resort of writers and artists of the day. Adrian Wilson not only printed the book in an oblong format to accommodate photographs of the paintings, but his design ingeniously captured the spirit of the pictures by using their frieze of black cats freely here and there throughout the volume. In later years he showed equally great ingenuity and freedom of design in suiting type to text in books with such various subject matter as eleven essays by California authors gathered under the title, *My First Publication*; Robert Louis Stevenson’s sentimental portrayal of *San Francisco, A Modern Cosmopolis*; Horatio Alger’s success story for boys, *The Young Miner*; and a thorough study of a great Renaissance book, Holinshed’s *Chronicles*.

All told, there were thirty books printed during the fifth decade of the Club that ended in 1961. Nine came from the Grabhorn Press, and two from the long-established Taylor & Taylor, but the striking thing about the remainder is that they were created by many different presses, thus

extending the practice begun in a limited fashion during the 1940's. The major book of the 1950's was, however, properly enough, the work of the region's greatest press for it was the Club's hundredth book. The text was a thorough bibliography of Club publications by David Magee, and it was issued in an appropriately imposing folio format, handsomely printed by the Grabhorn Press. As in the two volumes of the bibliography of their own publications, also created by David Magee, the Grabhorns displayed pages of books published earlier by the Club and thus reminded old members of past achievements and introduced new members to the distinguished examples of fine bookmaking that local presses had created under the sponsorship of the Book Club.

Over the years while these hundred books were issued, California, and more particularly the San Francisco Bay Area, had become a center of fine printing, a status for which the Club was in large part responsible, and now it was able to reap the rewards by spreading its commissions around quite widely. No one of the new presses got more than three books to do in the 1950's, but several had that many. One of them was Lawton Kennedy's now separate establishment from which the Club received trimly made works of nice letterpress and fine reproductions that grew in beauty and magnitude to the striking folio leaf book, *The Garden of Health*, issued in 1957. In the next decade Lawton Kennedy went on to print four more works for the Club, including another handsome folio leaf book, this one incorporating a page from an early edition of Chaucer's works.

Another printer added to the Club's roster of bookmakers in the 1950's was Mallette Dean. He had long been known to Club members for the handsome initials and colorful drawings and woodcuts he had created for Grabhorn Press publications, including *The Discovery of Florida* and *Ace High*, issued by the Club in the 1940's. These he now made a feature of his own typographic design in the beautiful *Physiologus* that was the Club's Christmas book in 1953, and in succeeding volumes. After years of suiting his art to the typography of others, Mallette Dean found that "the most important and appreciated aspect of printing for the Club is that the printers are free to design as they please, and are not asked to submit proofs." Another Grabhorn associate, and a mighty close one too, also created books for the Club in this decade. That was Jane Grabhorn. She had her own very independent views of typography, as anyone who has seen her rollicking Jumbo Press books knows, but in her rather more conventional guise of The Colt Press she created for the Club

a sympathetically playful but not unduly fanciful treatment of a first edition by Mark Twain, simply titled *Concerning Cats*.

Still another new contributor to the Club's bookmaking was a fine firm from southern California, The Plantin Press of Saul and Lillian Marks. Although they had previously printed Keepsakes (the earliest was for the second series in 1935), their first book for the Club came in 1960 when they created the only modern printing of Jessie Fremont's obscure volume of recollections, *A Year of American Travel*, that was marked by their clean style and a feminine grace suited to the author. The Club also tried another new printer, Charles R. Wood and Associates, San Francisco lithographers. As an experiment the Club decided to have them make a facsimile of the original printings of the report of Portolá's expedition of 1770, accompanied by a new translation and an introduction by George P. Hammond, Director of The Bancroft Library. Although the text was liked, there were some doubts in many members' minds as to whether this form of printing suited the Club's tradition of fine typography. It created an interesting question just as another was raised when the Club was fortunate enough to be permitted to publish a paper by Stanley Morison, one of the era's great scholars and practitioners of typography. In *Typographic Design in Relation to Photographic Composition* Morison argued that a photographically-composed book cannot aesthetically supplant one set in metal type. The Club, obviously sharing his views, has foregone further experiment and has continued to support traditional techniques for the creation of its fine books.

Traditionalism was cultivated more than ever in a work created in 1952 by Lewis and Dorothy Allen, during their temporary residence in Cagnes-sur-Mer. There they printed 300 copies of Robert Louis Stevenson's *La Porte de Malétroit*. Although this was the first Club work produced out of the state since the unhappy Norwood Press publication of 1917, it was more notable as the only one of its books to be created entirely by hand. Most Club books had been hand set and printed on hand-made papers, but none had previously been printed on a hand-press. This text, like others the Allens had produced for the Club, was of their own selecting, and to achieve the richness that they believed appropriate to the story every sheet was put through the press two to six times to print different colors. And what a press it was! To the Club Allen wrote that this "little hand-press, although Parisienne and a jewel to gaze upon assumes an ugly leer whenever we lay a hand on her. She is recalcitrant, perverse, and demoniacal. She is reminiscent of the she-ass described by Stevenson in his 'Travels with a Donkey'." So hard was she upon Allen's spirit that he

needed a good deal of recourse to the printers' proverbial friendly spirits. As he wrote, "To soothe our aching muscles, we've discovered a local liniment, which, when applied internally, is pleasantly soporific." The Allens' two other Club books of the decade were charming productions conventionally printed on power presses in California, but in course of time they took to the hand-press exclusively. Despite the relatively large editions required by the Club, in 1966 the Allens created a monumental folio for the Club, titled *The Great Polyglot Bibles*, in which, once again, all pages bore at least two colors as well as impressive reproductions of contemporary woodcuts, all painstakingly run through their early-nineteenth-century press.

The Book Club of California is now approaching its sixtieth birthday. In its sixth decade it continues to look to the printers who have long been responsible for creating its distinguished publications, but it turns to new ones, too, like Grant Dahlstrom's Castle Press of Pasadena and the Grabhorn-Hoyem Press of San Francisco. Although the latter press is continuing a great tradition, it has developed its own impressive style, as may be seen by comparing its edition of Robert Becker's *Designs on the Land* with the Grabhorn Press' handling of Becker's first book on diseños of California ranchos.

The variety of the Club's texts is also remarkable. In recent years they have included first editions of Bret Harte, Mark Twain, Stevenson, and Gelett Burgess. They have included also the first printings of works by plainer persons which, however, constitute Californiana of consequence, like the journal and drawings of Joseph LeConte's daughter Carrie made during a visit to Yosemite in 1878. Furthermore, the Club has issued great reproductions of graphic arts like the series of facsimiles of Japanese prints from the collection of Edwin Grabhorn that he and his brother Robert made into four of the most appealing of the always lavish publications issued at Christmas time. Other books have been original scholarly treatises of academic importance like Professor Charles Muscatine's history of the editions of Chaucer's works, the Reverend Basil Hall's account of polyglot Bibles, Professor Stephen Booth's historical and critical study of Holinshed's *Chronicles*, Professor Franklin Walker's story of early bohemian days in Carmel, and Robert Becker's two volumes treating land grant maps or disenos of California. Among the Club's recent volumes have also been the first modern editions of rare works, like Fremont's *Geographical Memoir on Upper California*, whose background and significance was set forth in scholarly prefaces by Allan Nevins and Dale Morgan. Upon occasion the recent books have been lighter in tone, like the at-

tractive reprinting of a Horatio Alger text set in California and introduced by Professor John Seelye's knowing but witty essay on the Alger legendry. Books published in the 1960's have also included original works like an historical study of Archy Lee, California's first fugitive slave, and an account of the private press ventures of Robert Louis Stevenson and his stepson.

For a long time the Club limited itself to 875 members, mainly because printers cannot produce editions large enough to satisfy a much bigger roster. At that, the Club rarely prints 500 copies of a book, and it never goes beyond that number. Nowadays these usually go out of print rapidly, but although they are only briefly available to persons who are members at the time of publication, the Club takes in new members whenever vacancies occur and other persons have an opportunity to see its books and Keepsakes and to read its *News-Letter* at 139 libraries which presently hold memberships.

I began by referring to some events contemporary with the founding of the Book Club. They included the discovery in 1912 of Piltdown Man, but he is now no more than a fraudulent skeleton in the closet of anthropology. I referred also to the great popularity that year of Jean Webster's *Daddy-Long-Legs*, but who in the four corners of the globe reads that novel now? I cited the construction of the Grand Central terminal, but just as passenger trains have almost disappeared from our land so has that neo-Renaissance edifice been dwarfed since its air rights were sold to accommodate an airline company's skyscraper, topped by a heliport. Finally, while 1912 was the date of the filming of the first newsreel, that form of motion picture has since disappeared. All, all are gone or changed. But the Book Club of California remains. It has outlasted the artifacts of culture that historians in 1912 would have selected as their year's legacy to the ages.

The founding fathers of the Club are all gathered to their fathers and the early presses have all disappeared, yet the Club stands and is as vigorous as ever. Indeed, it is more vigorous in its late fifties than it was in its thirties. It continues to foster the study of the history and literature of its region and it inspires printers great and small. In its quiet way the Book Club of California has been and continues to be a significant force not only in its place—that is its native state—but in its time as it aids the graphic arts and crafts of the twentieth century. 25

The Fifteenth Century's Great Picture Book

*By Ellen Shaffer**

LEWIS CARROLL's heroine, shortly before she popped down the rabbit hole, on glancing disapprovingly at her sister's reading matter, asked herself: "What is the use of a book without pictures?" Most people do prefer illustrations; the ancient Egyptians liked their profile portraits, mediaeval owners rejoiced over the glowing miniatures in Books of Hours, and the twentieth century bibliophile always has to take at least a quick look at the latest book of photographic color plates of people and places.

One of the world's most profusely illustrated books appeared almost five hundred years ago, and it is still a favorite with those fortunate enough to have seen it, the Nuremberg Chronicle, printed in that city in 1493. In form and content the book is mediaeval, but its conception could well belong to the twentieth century. Its creators set out to produce the most impressive picture book to ever come from the printing press—which was then some fifty years old—and they succeeded. Theirs was a glorified Chamber of Commerce project. Nuremberg was at that time a wealthy, powerful city of some 20,000 persons. Its opulent burghers knew all about gracious living. It also was the center of the woodcutter's art, and four partners joined together in an undertaking to demonstrate this fact. Two brothers-in-law, Sebald Schreyer and Sebastian Kammermaister, among the richest men in the city, were to furnish the money for the undertaking, and the other two partners, a father and stepson team, Michael Wolgemuth and Wilhelm Pleydenwurf, who were the leading woodcut artists in Nuremberg, were to furnish the illustrations for a work which in Hollywood parlance was to be both stupendous and colossal.

Naturally a text was needed for the book and a printer to publish it, and two people were hired by the four partners. The author, Hartmann Schedel, was the City physician and perhaps its leading humanist. He had traveled widely for his time, he was a book collector with an extensive library, and for three years he had been writing a history of the world from the creation to his own day—in fact he may have suggested the

*Ellen Shaffer is Curator of The Silverado Museum, St. Helena, California. This delightful, informal account of a famous book is based on a talk Miss Shaffer gave at the University of San Francisco.

theme of the book to the four partners. Such an all-inclusive subject would indeed lend itself readily to illustration.

The printer chosen was Anton Koberger, the leading exponent of that craft in Nuremberg and a business man whose large scale operations again have the ring of the twentieth century. He owned twenty-four presses, employed a hundred workers, and as publisher and bookseller had agencies in at least ten foreign countries. The lavish scale extended to his domestic life as well; he had twenty-five children. (His first wife had eight, while the second Mrs. Koberger managed to more than double that record and had seventeen.)

The partners had entered into their agreement in December of 1491. For the next nineteen months the chips flew in the atelier of Michael Wolgemuth, where he and his stepson busily drew directly on the wooden blocks, while the *formschneider*, those craftsmen who cut the design out of the wood to make it stand in relief, struggled to keep up with them.

Meantime, Schedel was carrying out his part of the bargain, and it was a difficult assignment. To write a history of the world would seem task enough, but he had other problems. His text was subservient to the woodcuts and he had to gauge his copy accordingly. He may never have heard the term "layout" but he learned all about it, and was, no doubt, entirely self-taught. Some of his layouts are still in existence and show how competently he managed his task. Naturally enough, his text began at the beginning with the Creation, and he divided history into eight sections; or ages:

The First Age is from the Creation to the Deluge

The Second is from the Deluge to the Birth of Abraham

The Third Age continues from Abraham and ends with King David

The Fourth Age ends with the Babylonian captivity

The Fifth Age closes with the incarnation of Jesus

The Sixth Age is that in which Schedel (and ourselves) live—from the birth of Christ till the end of the world, a time God only knows

The Seventh Age is that of anti-Christ

and

The Ultimate Age is the Last Judgment

While he was at it, in that love for drawing parallels so dear to the mediaeval writer, Schedel explained the various ages of man. Shakespeare

later had seven, but Schedel was content with six, and they may startle a present-day reader:

The First Age is Infancy—from birth to seven years

The Second is Childhood which lasts till the age of fourteen

The Third is Adolescence—from fifteen to thirty-eight years. (This probably explains the protesting youth in our universities—they haven't grown up yet.)

The Fourth Age, Youth is from thirty-nine to forty-nine years of age

The Fifth, Old Age, comes abruptly at fifty and continues to seventy-nine

The Sixth and final Age is Decrepitude—from eighty to the end.

The Nuremberg Chronicle was completed in July of 1493 and offered for sale. True to its creator's avowed intention, it was illustrated as no printed book had been previously. There was virtually a picture on every page, and most pages had several, in fact the woodcuts in the book totalled over 1800. The wealthy purchaser of that day might have his pictures either plain or colored (the latter were done by hand, of course) and he paid three times as much if he elected to have color. (One authority has reckoned that the plain cost was the equivalent of \$26 and the colored \$78—fabulous sums in the fifteenth century.) Koberger could offer attractive bindings, or the buyer might choose another more to his taste.

As an added touch of modernity, the Chronicle was announced with a publisher's blurb and through the stately Latin text one glimpses the fifteenth century Nuremberg go-getter. It reads in part:

"Nothing like this has hitherto appeared to increase and heighten the Delight of men of learning or anyone who has any education at all: The New Book of Chronicles with its pictures of famous Men and Cities which has just been printed at the Expense of Generous Citizens of Nuremberg.

Indeed I venture to promise you, reader, so great Delight in reading it that you will think you are not reading a Series of Stories, but looking at them with your own eyes. For you will see there not only Portraits of Emperors, Popes, Philosophers, and Poets and other famous men, each pictured with the proper marks of His Period, but also pictures of the Most Famous Cities and Places of all Europe as each one began, flourished, and continues to be.

When you look on all these Acts, Deeds, and Wise Sayings you will think them live.

Farewell, and do not let this book escape you."

This would be good advertising copy even today—the wealthy American, like the wealthy Nuremberg patrician, hardly cares to be considered uneducated.

The work opens with a full-page woodcut of God the Father surrounded by a "glory" as substantial as piecrust fluting, which it somewhat resembles. At His feet are two shields, left empty for the painting in of the owner's armorial device—for it was assumed that an owner of the *Chronicle* would have one. The Creation and the formation of the world are shown in succeeding pages, followed by the creation of Adam. The temptation in the garden and the expulsion from Eden are shown in the same woodcut—a common mediaeval device to telescope two events into a single picture. Noah and the Ark are shown with the Dove arriving a bit ahead of schedule, even as the building of the world's most noted vessel is going on, and Abraham and his progeny are depicted in quite literal family trees, whose trailing vines and branches extend across two pages.

The present day viewer has not gone many pages before he realizes that he has seen some of the woodcuts before—and he has indeed. While there were 1817 illustrations in the volume there were actually only 645 different ones, and 645 is a goodly number at that. To the mediaeval mind a picture was a picture. Why be concerned that the same woodcut serves for Paris, Dante, Plutarch, Alcuin, and Cato? Perhaps they did look alike, who knows? And in the fifteenth century, who cared? Purchasers of the Nuremberg *Chronicle* were not bothered by 1165 instances of repetition. Forty-four varieties of kings serve for 270 royal personages and 28 types of pope represent 226 wearers of the papal crown. Twenty-two cuts depict 69 cities—Naples and Mainz, for example both had the same woodcut, but the 26 large double-page woodcuts of cities are accurate in delineating distinguishing features of each. In Rome one sees the Coliseum and the Castle of San Angelo and the old Basilica Church of St. Peter. (The corner stone of the present famous edifice was not laid until thirteen years after the *Chronicle* was printed.)

While the *Chronicle's* advertisement had promised that famous men would be pictured, each with the proper marks of his period, it never occurred to the artists that any of the people they portrayed lived in surroundings unlike those of Nuremberg or dressed in any fashion un-

like that of its inhabitants. As a result they now give us delightful glimpses into the daily life of the time. The Tower of Babel is shown under construction—as a building would have been reared in Nuremberg. Noah, Abraham and Lot dress as did the neighbors of Wolgemuth and Pleydenwurf. One woodcut shows Joseph appearing before Pharaoh, while Potiphar's wife determinedly plucks at his cloak in an effort to entice him into a cozy bed with billowy plaid pillows. In a little recess under the bed may be seen a pair of shoes. Whatever her morals, Mrs. Potiphar was a superb housekeeper, and sin must have been comfortable in old Nuremberg.

The death of St. John the Baptist provides another peep into a Nuremberg home. The tetrarch is shown as a respectable, middle-aged burgher, quietly enjoying a meal in his own house. The table is set with knives and goblets (forks were not yet in use) and beneath it is a small brazier to keep the family's feet warm. Everyone is relaxed and happy except the twentieth century observer, who suddenly suffers a nasty shock on seeing the saint's head on a platter in the middle of the table.

Comets whiz through pages, there are plagues of locusts, book burnings, and liquidations of people. One saint who has a distinctive woodcut is St. Cecilia, who displays not a musical instrument, but a hornbook. Some confusion had occurred in the production of this woodcut as the "D" on the hornbook is shown in reverse.

While the woodcut artists were working on Strassburg with its great cathedral, or perhaps showing poor old Seneca opening his veins in a round wooden wash tub, Schedel was working industriously with his text which had to come out even with the woodcuts. He was primarily a compiler and he drew his history from many sources. One authority notes that when Schedel found two of his sources in disagreement he would take a portion of a sentence from one and the rest of it from the other—a literary balancing act which might not have missed the mark by much at that. Only once in the entire work does Schedel drop the impersonal tone of the historian and speak to us in the first person, and that is when he pays an eloquent tribute to his beloved teacher, the physician Mattioli of the University of Padua. "My most erudite master. Whom I Hartmann Schedel heard regularly during three years. . . . He had at his command supreme knowledge of poetry and oratory. In astronomy, geometry, arithmetic and music he had studied with the ancients with all his powers. . . . He caused those who listened to him to become docile, benevolent and attentive and informed by his own discourse. . . ."

On the same page (Folio cclii verso) in which Schedel recalled his happy school days with Mattioli, he also hailed the newly invented art of print-

ing, discovered, he tells us, in Mainz in 1440. "O happy printing—memorable in our time! Almost all that thou now spreadest in the world was disappearing. Therefore, let everyone praise thee in the highest. Let thy inventor be extolled in every language, for now under thy guidance . . . anyone may become learned at little expense." We might remember this apostrophe to printing the next time we pass one of our current newsstands, reflect for a moment on what we have done with the art that meant so much to Schedel—and have the grace to blush.

By the time Schedel had worked his way through accounts of people still living in his time—his last biography was of Emperor Maximilian—he noted that there might transpire in the future events that would be worthy of note, and he thoughtfully left three blank leaves on which history after 1493 might be written. He then considered the reign of anti-Christ and death and the end of things, after which he wrote a colophon in which he stated he had completed his work on June 4, 1493. (A few pages earlier he had stated that he had completed it on June 10.) In his colophon he made no mention of anyone except himself. The other participants in the production of the Chronicle were ignored.

However, although Schedel might be through other members of the group were not, and other "learned men" took up the task of describing various countries, as well as people. Ireland, land of saints and song, got the most summary treatment in her entire history. The unknown author in three lines remarked that as not much was doing in Ireland one might as well turn to Spain. Eventually the text terminated with a map of modern Europe and a colophon in which everyone except Schedel was mentioned. The date of completion was given as July 12, 1493.

No time was lost in issuing a second edition, this time with the text in German, which appeared, according to its colophon, on December 23, 1493. It proved even more popular than its predecessor and far fewer copies of it survive today. Three years after the appearance of the two large folio editions in Nuremberg, the book received its most sincere compliment—it was pirated. Johann Schönsperger, a cheerful buccaneer who made a practice of piracy, published a German edition in 1496, a Latin edition in 1497, and another German edition in 1500. He had new (and inferior) woodcuts, some 2,100 of them, prepared and issued in a smaller format, almost half the size of the original Chronicle. Less cumbersome and easier to carry about, the pirated editions were evidently received with joy, and few of them survive today. (*continued next issue*)

ROUNCE & COFFIN CLUB'S WESTERN BOOKS EXHIBITION of 1671
Both *Printing as a Performing Art*, designed and printed by Arlen Philpott,
and *Journal of a Journey Across the Plains in 1859*, designed and produced by
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exhibition, on view in the Book Club's rooms February 22 to March 12.



PLEASE NOTE:

The title of Dorothy Abbe's magnificent book reviewed in the last issue
of the *Quarterly* is THE DWIGGINS MARIONETTES, not *Prelude to Eden* which is
the title of one of the plays. We apologize.



Annual Meeting

The Annual Meeting of The Book Club of California will be held at the
Club rooms, 545 Sutter Street, San Francisco, on Tuesday, March 16, at
11:30 a.m.

Secretary

The Life and Times of the Virginia City TERRITORIAL ENTERPRISE

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Being highly entertaining and enlightening Reminiscences of
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❧ The Mother Lode ❧

By *Philip R. May*

Published by the University of Canterbury, New Zealand, this book will be available in March. Demy octavo (5½ x 8½ inches), 64 pages, clothbound, limited to 1000 copies. \$5.25.

The terms 'Mother Lode' or 'Mother Lode Country' are familiar to California gold-mining buffs and are regularly employed in popular accounts and histories of the California gold rush. This monograph examines the several ways in which the term 'Mother Lode' is applied in California, but in particular it questions the common assumption that 'Mother Lode' was coined early in the gold rush years.

Its introduction in California is here placed in the latter 1860's and it is attributed not to the early experience of Mexican and American quartz miners, but is related to the opening of Nevada's Comstock Lode and the writings of a group of geologists and mining publicists. Thereafter, the usage 'Mother Lode' is linked with the erratic history of hardrock mining in the Sierra gold country and its adoption is shown to be closely tied to the fortunes of this sector of California's gold-mining industry.

Because of its bearing on the evolution of precious metal mining in the American West, the monograph will be of interest to historians of the mining frontier, besides being a contribution to the etymology of a popular California term.

Mr. May is the author of *WEST COAST GOLD RUSHES* and *GOLD TOWN*, both concerned with New Zealand gold mining, and *ORIGINS OF HYDRAULIC MINING IN CALIFORNIA*, published by this firm.



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